



# Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

*A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource*

**Susanna Garcia presents:**

## **Waltz in B Minor, Op. 69, No. 2 by Frédéric Chopin**

### **Process and Practice**

**Fully Present:** Tips for maintaining focus and engagement over time

- Listen to recordings together and/or watch video performances. Discuss the differences that are seen and heard and maybe, even try some new ideas out.
- Prepare a performance for online sharing with others or even live streaming. Student motivation and practicing can really spike with projects such as this.
- It can be tough keeping a piece fresh over time. Sometimes, the best thing is to put it away for a time, then come back to it with fresh ears. When you do, ask the student to remember what drew her or him to the piece in the first place. Discussing this can help to revive interest that may be waning.

**Break it Up:** Useful practice segments; how to connect them and plug them back into the whole

- 5 spots that contain difficulties for students. Once each spot is fluent, integrate it gradually into the larger section by building around it, two bars at a time, until the entire phrase can be played comfortably.
  - Measures 5-8:  
While the left hand continues with the 1-2-3 waltz bass, the right hand must execute a rhythm that overlaps it (1-2; 1-2-3; 1-2) before the parts align again. This can be practiced a number of ways include tapping, chanting, and through movement exercises. At the piano, playing the melody with only the downbeat bass note will help the student feel the stressed notes.
  - Measures 13-18:  
The melody here is an unusually long string of continuous eighth notes, spanning two octaves, with many convoluted extensions and contractions of the right hand. Locate and block out the different positions within that melody and examine each shift. One awkward shift occurs at the end of m. 13 when the right hand must contract to play an ascending half-step using fingers 1 and 5. Fingering is very important here, so be sure the student has a thoughtful one worked out.
  - Measures 14-16, 30-32, 62-64, 125-128:  
The waltz accompaniment is very regular with the bass note on the downbeat and two chords filling the rest of the bar. However, Chopin always changes this pattern at the cadence. These measures can be confusing to students so it's

important that students are aware of them and have isolated them in practice. There is also a pattern change at mm. 47-50.

- Measure 113:

The double note passage can be very tricky as students may be prone to locking their wrist and hand. I find that breaking the 6 notes under one slur into two slurs of three notes each can assist the student with the needed wrist rotation.

- Measures 125-128:

A lot is happening in these four bars because they contain a modulation back to B minor. Notice the secondary dominant in m. 126! In addition, there are quick position shifts and a pattern change in the waltz bass.

**Layers and outlines:** Tips for focusing on how the parts makeup the whole

- An analysis of the form (AA AB AB CC A AB) and the cadences will help the student understand how the piece is organized. Analyze other waltzes or other pieces that have a similar organizational structure. Scott Joplin rags exhibit a similar formal plan, as well a jump bass, but in a completely different style.
- Even though there is quite a bit of sectional repetition, there is also a lot of variation within each section. Examine how Chopin treats melodic variation in this piece and in others. Continuous variation of the melody through ornamentation is a technique that Chopin cultivated. You can explore this further with your student. The Eb Nocturne, Op. 9 No. 2 would be a good place to start.

**Achieving flow:** Ideas for finding and maintaining tempo, managing modifications artistically

- Maintaining tempo: As with any piece, the student's ideal tempo is the tempo of the most challenging section. But if this tempo isn't satisfactory to convey the music, work to improve the section by determining the cause of the difficulty: Is it a fingering, a rhythm, a chord, a coordination issue?
- Tempo modifications - ritardando: If you locate all the "ritardando - a tempo" indications, you will find that they always occur at cadence points. This is one of the expressive purposes of cadences that students can easily hear. I like to demonstrate this idea from other pieces that they may know or have played in the past. For working on timing, I sometimes "conduct" these passages by tapping their shoulders while they are playing, then switching roles.
- Tempo modifications - con anima (mm. 33-65): This section indicates "a tempo, con anima." I find this to be the most dramatic section in the waltz as it also contains unexpected and highly chromatic return of the main theme. This is a good time to encourage imaginative thinking. What narrative could exist to explain the swirling, animated motion of this new theme, then its sudden interruption? This is also the only time that the music reaches a "forte" dynamic, so it warrants special treatment. Demonstrate various ways this character could be achieved.

**Make it mine:** Tips for developing and refining a personal, internal sense of the piece

- Develop imagery or use character words for phrases or sections, especially where there are unusual harmonies, changes in dynamics, or changes in tempo.

- Explore opportunities for rubato. Discuss when and why a pianist may choose to use rubato. Provide a variety of models to help develop a sense of this.

**Deep knowing:** Tips for securing memory

- Map the Music: Mapping is a useful technique both for learning music and for memorization. A map can include anything that encourages understanding of the music. It should include the major sections, the keys and cadences, hints about the melody, and any dynamics or rhythmic modifications. You may wish to refer to Mapping Music For Faster Learning and Secure Memory by Rebecca Shockley for some models.
- Harmonic and Melodic Analysis: This is useful not only for keeping track of the left hand chords, but for understanding how the melody relates to the underlying chord. Ask the student to locate the chord tones within the melody. This can really assist memorization by highlighting the similarities and differences between the melody and the accompaniment.
- Hands Separate Review: Perform the piece as a duet with your student. Play one hand while they play the other, then switch. This is a great memorization review.
- Tempo Variation: Play the piece at two metronome settings that are slower from their actual tempo. This can expose areas that students need to review.

**Final stages:** Tips for ensuring performance readiness, maintaining freshness and spontaneity, and reinforcing an expressive personal connection

- It is really important for students to try out their repertoire under different conditions so that they are ready for whatever happens during a performance. Here are some things that I like to do with my students:
  - Practice in different environments and on different pianos. Environmental changes can wreak havoc on students especially if they are prone to anxiety. Don't forget to change the lighting conditions. I sometimes turn off the lights in my studio, except for the piano lamp, and ask my students to play.'
  - Get ready for memory slips. If you have made a map, practice starting at different significant locations within the map. I also like to play "stop/go" with students. As they are playing, I will randomly say "stop," then "go." This is designed to help them stay focused and think about the upcoming phrase.
  - Provide lots of performing opportunities. Performing is a separate skill that needs its own practice regimen. Many small performances can help to build success performing. Video record these and review them with the student to help make improvements.